The science of fighting terrorism : the relation between terrorist actor type and counterterrorism effectiveness

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8 Misreading the enemy: successful repression and flawed prevention in 'the broad approach' against jihadist terrorism in the Netherlands

Like many European countries, the Netherlands woke up to the reality of jihadist terrorism after the 9/11 attacks and the Madrid bombings.[1] A whole string of countermeasures was introduced, ranging from special antiterrorism legislation, to the founding of a national coordinator for counterterrorism, and from the widening of police powers to the creation of the CT-Infobox, a database where government actors could share and access information about possible terrorists on Dutch soil. The sense of urgency was heightened further by the first fatal terrorist attack on Dutch soil since 27 May 1990, when a Provisional IRA unit mistakenly killed two Australian tourists in the southern town of Roermond.[2] On 2 November 2004, incidentally the day after the first National Coordinator for Counterterrorism (*Nationaal Coördinator Terrorismebestrijding*, NCTb) had assumed office, Mohammed Bouyeri killed controversial columnist and film maker Theo van Gogh. Several months earlier Van Gogh, known for his fierce criticism of Islam, had released *Submission*, a movie which criticised the way women are treated in Islamic communities around the world.[3] On this project Van Gogh had cooperated with Ayaan Hirsi Ali, a Somali-born politician, former Muslim and, like Van Gogh, a well-known Islam-critic. Hirsi Ali's cooperation with Van Gogh was too much to bear for Bouyeri. He shot Van Gogh in broad daylight and then slit the film maker's throat with a large knife.[4] The impact of the incident was enormous: the Dutch public was deeply shocked by the brutality of the

[1] In making this assessment, the author also used insights gained from two interviews with Paul Abels, Head of the Terrorism and Extremism Department at the National Coordinator for Security and Counterterrorism.

[2] P. Prillevitz, "IRA-Aanslag in Roermond Was Blunder," *Historiën*, December 7, 2010, http://www.historien.nl/ira-aanslag-in-roermond-was-blunder/.

[3] Th. van Gogh and A. Hirsi Ali, *Submission*, 2004, http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aGtQvGGY4S4.

[4] "Theo van Gogh Vermoord (video)," *Nu.nl*, November 2, 2004, http://www.nu.nl/algemeen/435082/theo-van-gogh-vermoord-video.html.

murder, tensions between Muslims and non-Muslims rode high, and counterterrorism was catapulted to the top of the political agenda.[5]

While Bouyeri, as far as is currently known, had little help in the planning and execution of the Van Gogh murder, he was not alone in wanting to replace the Dutch social and political order with one that was more in line with the fundamentalist reading of the Islamic scriptures. Bouyeri was a member of the so-called Hofstad Group, a jihadist cell made up of Muslim youths who got together to conspire against the society in which they grew up. Although the Van Gogh murder is to date the only jihadist terrorist attack in the Netherlands to reach the execution phase, several Hofstad Group members were dabbling with guns and explosives, and a judge later ruled that the group was indeed a terrorist organisation.[6] Also, the Hofstad Group was placed on an official EU list of terrorist organisations.[7] Together with a cell around high-school drop-out Samir Azzouz, the Hofstad Group was the most active jihadist cell in the Netherlands, but there were more. The Dutch secret service AIVD estimated that there were some fifteen similar cells, and stated in 2004 that it was following 150 suspected terrorists "day and night".[8]

Although the approach was not codified until February 2011, the guiding principle of Dutch counterterrorism has always been that it should be comprehensive. This meant that, under the so-called 'broad approach', counterterrorism had to cover all stages of the process that an individual has to go through before s/he commits a terrorist attack. It was, put

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[5] RTL Nieuws, "Golf van Aanslagen Sinds Dood Van Gogh," accessed October 19, 2010, http://www.rtl.nl/(/actueel/rtlnieuws/)/components/actueel/rtlnieuws/2004/11_november/14/binnenland/1114_golf_van_aanslagen_1700.xml.

[6] A. Vermaat, "Hoe Hofstadgroep Toch Terroristisch Bleek," *Trouw*, December 20, 2010, http://www.trouw.nl/tr/nl/4324/Nieuws/archief/article/detail/1800797/2010/12/20/Hoe-Hofstadgroep-toch-terroristisch-bleek.dhtml.

[7] C. van Zanten, "Hofstadgroep Op Terreurlijst Europese Unie," *Elsevier*, December 28, 2006, http://www.elsevier.nl/Europese-Unie/nieuws/2006/12/Hofstadgroep-op-terreurlijst-Europese-Unie-ELSEVIER106174W/.

[8] "AIVD Volgt 150 Moslims Dag En Nacht," *Volkskrant*, May 15, 2004, http://www.volkskrant.nl/vk/nl/2686/Binnenland/article/detail/705877/2004/05/15/AIVD-volgt-150-moslims-dag-en-nacht.dhtml.

differently, not enough to focus on terrorist networks and their violent plans. The formation of radical ideas and the recruitment by jihadist cells had to be countered as well.[9] In spite of this wide range of measures to counter the terrorist threat, there is a certain reluctance on the part of the Dutch government to talk about effectiveness, about the way in which all these measures impacted on the jihadist movement in the Netherlands. A report of a government-sanctioned evaluation of Dutch counterterrorism policy claims that "in this research, too, it has not been possible to measure the effectiveness – in the broad sense of achieving goals – of counterterrorism measures".[10] A similar unwillingness can be observed with regard to the Action Plan Polarisation and Radicalisation, a plan intended to keep at-risk target groups from becoming radicals or terrorists. The plan was evaluated in 2012, but the final report warned the reader that the underlying research "was not aimed at the effectiveness of the Action Plan Polarisation and Radicalisation".[11]

This being the case, this chapter is, as far as is known to the current author, the first serious attempt at an assessment of the effectiveness of Dutch post-9/11 counterterrorism. The arguments for the unfeasibility of measuring counterterrorism effectiveness have been refuted in the first chapter, and the case of the Netherlands has nothing that should make us renege on the critique of the counterterrorism literature on which this research project is based. It will become clear below that, on the basis of the publicly available information, one can make assessments about what worked and what did not. With the qualification that not many of the counterterrorism principles have been applied, the conclusion is that the picture is mixed.

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[9] P.H.A.M. Abels, "Dreigingsbeeld Terrorisme Nederland: Nut En Noodzaak van Een 'All-Source Threat Assessment' Bij Terrorismebestrijding," ed. E.R. Muller and R. de Wijk (Deventer: Kluwer, 2008), 535.

[10] *Antiterrorismemaatregelen in Nederland in Het Eerste Decennium van de 21e Eeuw: Over Totstandkoming, Toepassing, Beoordeling En Aanpassing van Antiterrorismemaatregelen in Nederland 2001 – 2010* (Den Haag: Rijksoverheid, 2011), 109.

[11] V.R. van Guldener and H.P. Potman, *Vijf Jaar Lokale Projecten Polarisatie En Radicalisering: Resultaatinventarisatie over de Periode 2007-2011* (Arnhem: KplusV, 2012), 21.

8.1 Background

The jihadist terrorist threat in the Netherlands emerged at a time when the country's political climate was tense. In 2002 Pim Fortuyn, the flamboyant leader of the eponymous List Pim Fortuyn (*Lijst Pim Fortuyn*, LPF) had burst onto the political scene with an agenda that centred on criticism of the multicultural society, which he claimed was a failure. Following the lead of the LPF, other political parties, too, became more critical of the integration and immigration policies of previous decades. In the 1960s so-called 'guest workers' were brought in, initially from southern Europe, but later primarily from Morocco and Turkey, to fill labour shortages. The idea was that they would leave again, but many stayed in the Netherlands, forcing the government to adopt a policy on how to absorb them in Dutch society. Initially Dutch governments stressed the immigrants' right to keep their own cultural identity[12], but this began to change by the end of the 1990s, when opinion makers and political parties drew attention to the high unemployment rates among immigrants and their descendants, and to the disproportionally large share of crimes accounted for by second and third generation immigrants.[13] As this debate was intensifying, several high-profile incidents, such as a 1999 school shooting that was the result of a long-standing feud between two Turkish families, turned parts of the Dutch electorate against the multicultural society.[14] The reservations among the public about Muslim communities in the Netherlands were seemingly confirmed by the 9/11 attacks, which according to some observers fed the notion that there was a link between Islam and violence.[15]

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[12] Q. Eijkman, D. Lettinga, and G. Verbossen, *Impact of Counter-Terrorism on Communities: Netherlands Background Report* (Open Society Foundation and Institute for Strategic Dialogue, 2012), 6.

[13] One particularly influential essay was P. Scheffer, "Het Multiculturele Drama," *NRC Handelsblad*, January 29, 2000, http://retro.nrc.nl/W2/Lab/Multicultureel/scheffer.html.

[14] J. van den Dungen and C. Janssen, "Schutter Veghel Wilde Eer Wreken," *Telegraaf*, December 9, 1999, http://krant.telegraaf.nl/krant/archief/19991209/teksten/bin.schutter.html.

[15] E. Bleich, "State Responses to 'Muslim' Violence: A Comparison of Six West European Countries," *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 35, no. 3 (2009): 367.

The debate about how to deal with the problems among immigrant communities became heated, especially after Fortuyn had been murdered. According to one strand in the debate, the high crime rates and the poor socio-economic performance of Muslim communities were directly linked to the immigrants' culture. In essence, the critics held, first, that the cause of the problems was an unwillingness of the immigrant communities to adapt to life in the Netherlands and, second, that the Islamic belief system kept Dutch Muslims from doing so. Prominent commentators and politicians like Theo van Gogh, Pim Fortuyn, Frits Bolkestein, Ayaan Hirsi Ali and Afshin Ellian argued that Dutch Muslims stuck to values that were incompatible with western democracy. They contrasted what they believed to be the cornerstones of Dutch society – religious tolerance, freedom of speech, the separation of church and state – to the religious bigotry, discrimination of women and hostility towards homosexuality that they felt were typical of Muslim communities.[16] Pim Fortuyn even went so far as to call Islam "a retarded culture", and claimed that he would, if he could find an adequate legal arrangement, make sure that not a single Muslim would ever be allowed to move to the Netherlands.[17] The view that high crime and unemployment rates were the result of the irreconcilable differences between Islam and western democracy, although far from uncontested, gained the upper hand, and became the working hypothesis of the administrations of Prime Minister Jan-Peter Balkenende. In Dutch policy towards immigrants from 2002 on, integration in Dutch society was more important than the immigrants'

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[16] A. Ellian, "Politieke Islam Is Vijand van Het Westen," *NRC Handelsblad*, April 27, 2002, http://vorige.nrc.nl/opinie/article1555559.ece; Th. van Gogh, "Gebrek Aan Zelfrespect," *NRC Handelsblad*, June 15, 2001, http://vorige.nrc.nl/krant/article1536485.ece; F. Bolkestein and M. Arkoun, *Islam En Democratie: Een Ontmoeting* (Amsterdam: Contact, 1994); F. Bolkestein, "Het Debat Vordert, Al Zijn de Problemen Niet Opgelost," *Volkskrant*, August 31, 2006, http://www.volkskrant.nl/vk/nl/2664/Nieuws/archief/article/detail/789485/2006/08/31/Het-debat-vordert-al-zijn-de-problemen-niet-opgelost.dhtml; A. Hirsi Ali, "PvdA Onderschat Het Lijden van Moslimvrouwen," *NRC Handelsblad*, October 4, 2002, http://vorige.nrc.nl/opinie/article1567159.ece.

[17] F. Poorthuis and H. Wansink, "Pim Fortuyn Op Herhaling: 'De Islam Is Een Achterlijke Cultuur,'" *Volkskrant*, May 5, 2012, http://www.volkskrant.nl/vk/nl/2686/Binnenland/article/detail/611698/2012/05/05/Pim-Fortuyn-op-herhaling-De-islam-is-een-achterlijke-cultuur.dhtml.

right to maintain the culture from their countries of origin.[18] This became clear in suggestions from Minister for Integration and Immigration Rita Verdonk, who wanted to force immigrants and their children and grandchildren to only speak Dutch when out in public. She also proposed a ban on the *burqa*, the traditional Islamic garment for women that covers their entire bodies.[19]

A very small group of second and third generation immigrants, mostly youths, perceived the hardening of the debate and the position of the Dutch government as an attack on their culture and religion and linked them to events in very different parts of the world. They were outraged by the behaviour of western troops in Iraq and Afghanistan, by the military campaign in Chechnya and by western support for secular and dictatorial regimes in the Middle East.[20] They connected these dots with the unemployment and political climate they experienced in the Netherlands, and came to the conclusion that a global war against Islam was being waged, and that the Netherlands was one of the frontlines. The notion of a worldwide campaign against Islam led them to see the world as a confrontation between Good and Evil. There was Islam on the one hand and the unbelievers on the other.[21] In their view, it was the duty of every Muslim to take up arms in a holy war to protect the *ummah*, the worldwide Islamic community.[22]

The most important Dutch jihadist cell to join the giant fight against the unbelievers was the Hofstad Group. This group, variously located in Amsterdam, The Hague and Schiedam, was the most dangerous cell of

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[18] "Werken Aan Vertrouwen, Een Kwestie van Aanpakken: Strategisch Akkoord Voor Kabinet CDA, LPF, VVD," July 3, 2002, 13–14.

[19] F.J. Buijs, "Muslims in the Netherlands: Social and Political Developments after 9/11," *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 35, no. 3 (2009): 428.

[20] *De Gewelddadige Jihad in Nederland: Actuele Trends in de Islamistisch Terroristische Dreiging* (The Hague: AIVD, 2006), 33–34; Y. Kaddouri, *Lach Met de Duivel: Autobiografie van Een "Rotte Appel"- Marokkaan* (Amsterdam: Van Gennep, 2011), 77.

[21] H. Moors et al., *Polarisatie En Radicalisering in Nederland: Een Verkenning van de Stand van Zaken in 2009* (Tilburg: IVA Beleidsonderzoek en Advies, 2009), 63–64.

[22] J. Bartlett, J. Birdwell, and M. King, *The Edge of Violence* (London: Demos, 2010), 91.

the fifteen to twenty that were active at the height of the jihadist movement's activity. Unlike many other cells, they had several more or less concrete attack plans. Other cells functioned in a similar manner, but failed to get as close to the execution of a terrorist attack as the Hofstad Group. Also, Mohammed Bouyeri was a member of the Hofstad Group. The involvement of other group members in the planning of the attack has never been established, but Bouyeri's attack undoubtedly added to the group's notoriety. But although the Hofstad Group could credibly claim the status of *primus inter pares*, there were other active jihadist cells in the Netherlands. It should be noted that the remainder of this chapter addresses the movement as a whole, not only the Hofstad Group.

8.2 The jihadist movement in the Netherlands

8.2.1 Ideology

Islamic terrorist groups are often accused of using religion only as window-dressing.[23] The belief that underlies such claims is that the terrorists fail to understand Islam, or even consciously misinterpret it in order to lend legitimacy to their violent actions. At first glance the limited religious and theological sophistication of the thinking that went on in the Dutch jihadist movement seems to corroborate the case of those who downplay the importance of religion as a motivating factor for terrorists. In fact, it can even be argued that the movement's worldview was not so much a coherent ideology, but rather a rage against the social order and a justification for violent action couched in religious terms. This simplicity of the movement's worldview can be partly explained by the way the movement members developed these ideas. They undertook opportunistic internet searches for Quran quotes that justify the use of violence, and often took them out of context. They mixed those with ideas they took from discussions with their peers, who rarely knew much about

[23] C. Hellmich, "Al-Qaeda—terrorists, Hypocrites, Fundamentalists? The View from within," *Third World Quarterly* 26, no. 1 (2005): 40. For an example, see *The Role of Religion and Belief in the Fight against Terrorism* (Warsaw: OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights, 2002), 3; or *National Strategy for Combating Terrorism* (Washington, DC: US Government, 2006), 5.

Islam, and modern-day radical preachers.[24] The AIVD captured the haphazard nature of the resultant ideologies by labelling them 'cut-and-paste Islam'.[25]

This does not, however, mean that their dedication to their version of Islam was any less deep or sincere, and some of the sources of ideological and religious inspiration indeed lent credence to their claim that they were waging jihad. Much like their counterparts in other European countries, many Dutch jihadists claimed allegiance to a series of salafist extremist ideologues, most prominently Ibn Taymiyya, Sayyid Qutb, Muhammed Ibn Wahhab, the most prominent spokesmen of the *takfiri* interpretation of salafism that encourages violence against unbelievers. More recent figures that were frequently quoted, include the British controversial preachers Abu Qatada and Abu Hamza (see the chapter on jihadist terrorism in the UK), as well as Osama bin Laden and his ideological mentor Abdullah Azzam.[26] The influence of these men is clear in, for instance, the writings of Mohammed Bouyeri, who frequently used the slogan 'jihad by the rifle alone', first coined by Abdullah Azzam.[27]

What the Dutch jihadist movement took from these ideologues was, first, a vehement rejection of any institutions that were man-made, such as courts and parliaments. Dutch jihadists believed that those who created, maintained and used these institutions, put their own views on how to run a society above those of the Quran. When questioned about his beliefs during the trial that led to his conviction as a terrorist, Dutch jihadist Samir Azzouz spoke with disgust about "[t]he fact that people think they have the right to make laws: 'I, man, know better than Allah.' "[28] Anyone

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[24] M. Sageman, "Hofstad Case and 'Blob' Theory," in *Theoretical Frames on Pathways to Violent Radicalization: Understanding the Evolution of Ideas and Behaviors, How They Interact and How They Describe Pathways to Violence in Marginalized Diaspora* (ARTIS Research, 2009), 17.

[25] *Jaarverslag 2005* (The Hague: AIVD, 2006), 27.

[26] C.J. de Poot and A. Sonnenschein, *Jihadistisch Terrorisme in Nederland: Een Beschrijving Op Basis van Afgesloten Opsporingsonderzoeken* (Meppel: Boom Juridische Uitgevers, 2009), 50–51.

[27] Bartlett, Birdwell, and King, *The Edge of Violence*, 87.

[28] E. Vermaat, *Nederlandse Jihad: Het Proces Tegen de Hofstadgroep* (Soesterberg: Aspekt, 2006), 131.

involved in such an institution was an enemy of Islam, and deserved to be killed.[29] The second main tenet that Dutch jihadists derived from their readings of their ideological predecessors was their claim to the right to declare other Muslims apostates. Once it could be argued that a Muslim had strayed from Islam, jihadists had the right to kill him and take his possessions.[30] In other words, any Muslim who was active in a man-made institution or who was perceived to have slandered Islam, was a target.

The views espoused by the Dutch jihadist movement were very action-oriented, meaning that much of the movement's thinking concerned considerations about the legitimacy of violent actions. For instance, Hofstad Group member Jason Walters was at some point involved in a debate about whether robbing a bank to finance jihad was *halal*, i.e. in accordance with Islamic scripture.[31] Similarly, many discussions were held about whether or not jihadists were allowed to carry out attacks in their home countries. Some held that such a campaign would violate the Islamic duty to always respect one's host, whereas others, like the members of the Hofstad Group, argued that the Dutch government and people, as they had voted the government into office, had become a party in the war against Islam. Therefore, they were legitimate targets.

While the 'rules of engagement' were thus widely debated, the movement had considerably less to say about the new social order that would be introduced after the overthrow of the old one. There were no clear ideas about what the caliphate, the supposed ultimate goal of the struggle that tied the members of the movement together, would entail.[32] This lack of vision and the shallowness of the 'cut-and-paste Islam' make it tempting to dismiss the ideology of the Dutch jihadist movement as a mere veneer to hide destructive urges. This, however, would be underestimating the

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[29] R. Peters, *De Ideologische En Religieuze Ontwikkeling van Mohammed B.*, 2005, 3–4.

[30] E. Bakker, "Islamism, Radicalisation and Jihadism in the Netherlands: Main Developments and Counter-Measures," in *Understanding Violent Radicalisation: Terrorist and Jihadist Movements in Europe*, ed. M. Ranstorp (New York: Routledge, 2010), 172.

[31] Bartlett, Birdwell, and King, *The Edge of Violence*, 85.

[32] Poot and Sonnenschein, *Jihadistisch Terrorisme in Nederland*, 65.

importance of ideology in other respects. The role of religious ideas was not so much to commit members to an ultimate goal, but rather to create a common identity.

Movement participants derived a sense of heroism from their identification with radical Islamism and the creed of Al Qaeda, which instilled in them the idea that they were all part of a larger movement. In the words of Yehya Kaddouri, the first to be convicted under Dutch post-9/11 counterterrorism laws: "My new identity was very special, that's how I felt it. I was part of something big. A big community that would rise."[33] The use of religiously-sanctioned violence further added to Kaddouri's self-esteem: "The idea that I could make a bomb gave me an enormous sense of power. Power over the lives of lots of people, over whether or not to leave a building up, over whether or not to influence politics."[34] In choosing radical Islamism, movement members took advantage of the notoriety of these ideas after the 9/11 attacks. As a result of their association with Al Qaeda, they were feared by the society they wanted to rebel against.[35] The movement's religious ideas and the status that members derived from their dabbling in the jihadist creed thus offered a direction and meaning to frustrated immigrant youths who were looking for empowerment, a way to express their rage, and a group to belong to.

8.2.2 Organisational structure and culture

The jihadist movement in the Netherlands underwent rapid changes in the period 2001-2003. At the time of the 9/11 attacks most jihadists in the Netherlands were part of larger, transnational networks and were scouting Muslim communities for potential recruits for jihad in the Arab world.[36] That the Netherlands was a logistical base rather than a

[33] "Mijn nieuwe identiteit was zeer bijzonder, zo voelde het. Ik was onderdeel van iets groots. Een grote gemeenschap die zou herrijzen." Kaddouri, *Lach Met de Duivel*, 28.

[34] Ibid., 41.

[35] B. de Graaf, "The Nexus between Salafism and Jihadism in the Netherlands," *CTC Sentinel* 3, no. 3 (2010): 18.

[36] *De Gewelddadige Jihad in Nederland*, 16; *Jaarverslag 2003* (The Hague: AIVD, 2004), 24–25.

battlefield was clear from the activities of two cells that were dismantled in Rotterdam shortly after 9/11. In both cases the cell members were not planning attacks in the Netherlands, but were involved in financing and making travel arrangements for European jihadists who want to go to Afghanistan.[37]

But the dominance of recruiters on the Dutch jihadist scene came to an end around 2003. Gradually the jihadist movement in the Netherlands came to be dominated by young men who rallied around the ideas described in the previous paragraph and formed autonomous cells, that is, cells that had little to no contact with transnational networks. There were some international contacts, especially by the Hofstad Group, which led some to believe that the Dutch jihadist movement was plugged into a pan-European jihadist network. First, some members of the Hofstad Group travelled to Barcelona for a meeting with one of the perpetrators of the bombing in Casablanca in 2002. This contact, however, was never resumed afterwards.[38] Another indicator of the supposed international nature of the jihadist movement in the Netherlands was the training that some members of the Hofstad Group underwent in a training camp in Pakistan. Jason Walters, one of the movement members who went there, later boasted that he had learned how to fire a gun while doing a somersault and how to dissemble a Kalashnikov while blindfolded.[39] It should be noted, though, that he went there only twice, and once he was there for only ten days before he noticed he was being followed. As he did not want to expose his contacts in Pakistan, he felt forced to go back to the Netherlands.[40] By and large, the movement was clearly nationally embedded. Instead of seeking access to international jihadist networks, the new generation of Islamist radicals operated on their own accord. In

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[37] S. Eikelenboom, *Niet Bang Om Te Sterven: Dertig Jaar Terrorisme in Nederland* (Amsterdam: Nieuw Amsterdam, 2007), 72–77.

[38] *Jaarverslag 2004* (The Hague: AIVD, 2005), 19–20.

[39] P. Nesser, "How Did Europe's Global Jihadis Obtain Training for Their Militant Causes?," *Terrorism and Political Violence* 20, no. 2 (2008): 247–248.

[40] E. Vermaat, "Jason Walters: From Muslim Convert to Jihadist," *Militant Islam Monitor*, December 20, 2005, http://www.militantislammonitor.org/article/id/1449.

this, they were truly 'home grown': they consisted for a large part of Dutch citizens, reacted to perceived ills in Dutch society and, as we have seen above, created their own belief system. The recruiters, who often acted as religious mentors and strove to exploit the recruit's anger for jihad in faraway places like Afghanistan, thus lost their control over the direction taken by Dutch jihadists. As a result of several post-9/11 arrests and expulsions, they even disappeared from the Dutch jihadist scene altogether.[41]

The total membership of the jihadist movement in the Netherlands was estimated at some 150 to 200, divided over fifteen to twenty networks. The estimates from the period 2004-2005 have been consistent, but it is true that the size of the movement is difficult to gauge, given the loose structure of the movement. Indeed, the most prominent characteristic of jihadist movements all over Western Europe is a lack of a clear, formal organisational structure. In this respect it is interesting to note that none of the cells in the Dutch jihadist movement ever adopted a name for itself. The most famous cell is the Hofstad Group, but that cell's name was a label that the AIVD came up with, and was never used by the group members themselves.[42] In the same vein, members did not have official titles or roles, and drifted into and out of the movement, so it was not always easy to tell who was a member, and who was in charge of what.[43] In the absence of any formalised procedures, people got in touch on an *ad hoc* basis, and contacts were taken up as easily as they were abandoned later on.[44]

It was, nevertheless, possible for movement members to carve out a role for themselves. The various cells did have cores with more or less

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[41] *Jaarverslag 2008* (The Hague: AIVD, 2009), 21.

[42] *The "Hofstadgroep"* (TTSRL, 2008), 3.

[43] CTIVD, *Toezichtsrapport Inzake de Afwegingsprocessen van de AIVD Met Betrekking Tot Mohammed B.* (Den Haag: CTIVD, 2008), 28; L. Vidino, "The Hofstad Group: The New Face of Terrorist Networks in Europe," *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 30, no. 7 (2007): 587.

[44] Poot and Sonnenschein, *Jihadistisch Terrorisme in Nederland*, 90–91; Sageman, "Hofstad Case and 'Blob' Theory," 19.

accepted roles for certain individuals. Redouan al Issa, perhaps more widely known as Abu Khaled, for instance, was a Syrian who acted as a religious guide and mentor to members of the Hofstad Group.[45] Similarly, Mohammed Bouyeri had a reputation as a propagandist and writer, which is part of the explanation of the AIVD's failure to acknowledge the possibility that he might one day use violence himself. Under his *nom de guerre* Abu Zubair, he published inflammatory calls for jihad and ranted against Dutch society, but his true ambition was to gain the status of a real fighter, as opposed to someone who merely contributed words.[46]

In vesting their roles as ideological or operational leaders within the movement, its members had various means through which they could achieve such status. Knowledge of Arab and Islamic theology and especially practical experience with jihad were definitely assets for aspiring movement leaders. Also, close ties to other movement leaders helped movement members in the assumption of leading roles.[47] But powerful and influential as these figures might be, their authority never translated into a formal position.

The fluid nature of the movement was also a reflected in the way its members were recruited. There was no clear break in a movement member's life between the periods before and after he or she joined the movement. Instead, participation in the jihadist movement was often an extension of one's regular social life. It often grew out of normal social contacts, which meant that cells were made up of people who were friends or frequented the same mosques.[48] One member would approach a friend or an acquaintance to see whether the potential new recruit would be open to radical interpretations of Islam. The new recruit would

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[45] R. Abels and H. Butijn, "'Syriër Die Hofstadgroep Inspireerde Al Lang Weg,'" *Trouw*, December 27, 2004, http://www.trouw.nl/tr/nl/4324/Nieuws/archief/article/detail/1738560/2004/12/27/Syrier-die-Hofstadgroep-inspireerde-al-lang-weg.dhtml.

[46] *The "Hofstadgroep,"* 4 and 6.

[47] Poot and Sonnenschein, *Jihadistisch Terrorisme in Nederland*, 69–72.

[48] Ibid., 63–64; Sageman, "Hofstad Case and 'Blob' Theory," 20.

then be invited to one of the movement's many meetings, often held in one member's living room. At such gatherings, the participants would initially discuss religious ideas. Later, when it was clear that the recruit was susceptible to more radical views, they would watch jihadist propaganda material, such as operational instruction videos or footage of the suffering of Muslims in conflicts in Chechnya, Iraq and Afghanistan.

The recruitment process of the Dutch jihadist movement and the gradual hardening of the views that were being imposed on new recruits, were richly illustrated by two female peripheral members of the Hofstad Group who decided to make compromising statements about the Hofstad Group to the police. They told the police how Nouredine el-Fathni, a leading member of the Hofstad Group, first browbeat them for hours on end to turn them against apostates, including the two young women's parents, and against unbelievers like Theo van Gogh. After they had been won over, the two were made to watch footage of beheadings. Also, they were forced to accept the necessity of violent action. In online chat sessions with Jason Walters, the latter pressed the two women not to care about their victims: "You can shed their blood. Their blood is halal. In other words, killing is permitted."[49] In some cases the new recruit stuck around. In other cases he or she dropped out. This example concerns recruitment by face-to-face contact, but equally gradual recruitment processes took place online. After a certain bond of trust was created in online chat sessions in open forums, new participants would be invited to face-to-face meetings.[50] Here too, some were drawn into the movement, whereas others chose to stay away.

The informal nature of the recruitment process has been characteristic of the jihadist movement ever since the emergence of the autonomous cells in 2002/2003. The Hofstad Group attracted new members this way, as

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[49] "'Ze Gaven Me Veel Filmpjes van Onthoofdingen,'" *NRC Handelsblad*, September 19, 2005, http://vorige.nrc.nl/dossiers/moslimterreur/daders_verdachten_terroristen_t/article1637722.ece/Ze_gaven_me_veel_filmpjes_van_onthoofdingen.

[50] M. Sageman, *Leaderless Jihad: Terror Networks in the Twenty-First Century* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008), 110.

did, some ten years later, the groups of Dutch jihadists who planned to travel to Syria to join jihadist groups in the fight against the 'godless' government forces of dictator Bashar al-Assad. In March 2013, it turned out that some hundred Dutch jihadists were fighting in the Syrian civil war.[51] Many of them got to know each other in the peripheries of mainstream mosques, and were drawn to each other by their radical views. The importance of digital media appears to have increased, but the aspiring Syria-veterans, much like the Hofstad Group, meet in living rooms and garages to discuss religious ideas and watch footage from various conflicts in the Middle East.[52] Also, the new generation appears to draw part of its inspiration from charismatic, leading figures who act as recruiters and convince radical youths of the righteousness of jihad in Syria.[53]

But while the Dutch jihadist movement was and is an informal network with a low degree of organisation, there were certainly mechanisms that the movement applied to tie its members to the cause. First, peer influence easily turned into peer pressure. Movement members did not want to be found wanting as a faithful Muslim, much less did they want to be branded an apostate. Jason Walters, for instance, claimed that his behaviour in the Hofstad Group stemmed from a desire to impress his fellow movement members by showing off his radical ideas and his eagerness to use violence.[54] But this peer pressure could take more extreme forms as well. There have been instances of force and intimidation of cell members to get them to do the bidding of the group. Several peripheral members of the Hofstad Group, for example, claimed that they feared retaliation, according to one of them in the form of "a

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[51] *Samenvatting Dreigingsbeeld Terrorisme Nederland 32* (The Hague: NCTV, 2013), 2.

[52] B. van der Bol, S. Kamerman, and A. Kouwenhoven, "De YouTube Jihad," *NRC Handelsblad*, April 20, 2013, http://archief.nrc.nl/index.php/2013/April/20/Overig/nhnl01014/De+Youtube-jihad/check=Y.

[53] "Minderjarige Nederlanders in Syrië," *NOS*, May 17, 2013, http://nos.nl/artikel/507961-minderjarige-nederlanders-in-syrie.html.

[54] "Jason W. Typeert Zichzelf Als Vrij Naïef," *NRC*, October 27, 2010, http://vorige.nrc.nl/article2636194.ece.

bullet in the head", that would have befallen them had they refused to cooperate.[55] The second way in which the movement tried to cement the ties between its members, was through intra-group marriages. The Dutch jihadist movement had a remarkable degree of female participation when compared to similar movements in other European countries, which made this strategy all the more feasible.[56] Given the ideologically inspired revulsion with Dutch government institutions, these were not marriages that were recognised under Dutch law, but they were considered valid and binding by movement members.

A third element that deserves mentioning is the conspiratorial nature of many of the movement's dealings, which contributed to the formation of a collective identity and the identification of a common enemy. Cell members talked to each other on a need-to-know basis, used public computers when possible in order to avoid leaving digital evidence that could be traced back to them, and, when communicating online, used encrypted channels. They also had to observe a necessary level of vigilance in their use of mobile phones. Many used pre-paid phones, which were often exchanged and replaced, again to keep the police and the AIVD from linking phone calls to movement members.[57] The advantage of this way of working, except that it enhanced the movement's operational security, was that it fed the notion that movement members were brothers in arms engaged in a fight against a common enemy.[58]

The activities of the cells in the Dutch jihadist movement fell into four main categories. First, there was religious training and indoctrination, which, as we have seen above, took place in online forums and in the homes of movement members. Then there were the activities that were intended to keep the movement afloat. This took many forms, including

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[55] Vermaat, *Nederlandse Jihad: Het Proces Tegen de Hofstadgroep*, 95 and 101.

[56] *Jaarverslag 2005*, 26 and 28.

[57] Poot and Sonnenschein, *Jihadistisch Terrorisme in Nederland*, 116–121.

[58] Sageman, "Hofstad Case and 'Blob' Theory," 25.

forging passports for jihad travel or committing robberies and engaging in illicit trade to finance the movement's operations. Another important task was recruitment, something in which many women in the movement were involved. But the most important task of all, was the actual jihad, the carrying violent actions that were supposed to lead to the overthrow of the Dutch social order.

8.2.3 Modus operandi

Given the limited number of attacks that were actually carried out and given the decentralised nature of the jihadist movement, it is difficult to discern one modus operandi that applies to the entire movement. Nevertheless, it is possible to identify some categories of attacks on the basis of an analysis of the known attack plans.

First, there were plans for indiscriminate attacks against organisations that were perceived to play an important role in the fight against Islam. Although he was initially acquitted for this charge, Samir Azzouz, high school drop-out, friend of Mohammed Bouyeri and prominent member of the jihadist movement, appeared to have considered attacks on the buildings of the AIVD and the Ministry of Defence. He had maps of the surrounding areas of both buildings lying around in his apartment and was once spotted measuring distances around the AIVD head office in Leidschendam.[59] Moreover, at some point Azzouz he tried to recruit a Belgian jihadist for a suicide bombing on the premises of the secret service.[60] Another example of an attack in this category was the plan that Yehya Kaddouri had in mind. He was collecting materials for a bomb that he was planning to use in an attack on the Israeli embassy in The Hague. The strategic rationale behind actions like these may not have been very clear, even to the perpetrators themselves. In a TV-interview Kaddouri

[59] E. Vermaat, *De Hofstadgroep: Portret van Een Radicaal-Islamitisch Netwerk* (Soesterberg: Aspekt, 2005), 112–113.

[60] Eikelenboom, *Niet Bang Om Te Sterven*, 53.

later said that his intention was to spark "some kind of revolution", in which Muslims would "rebel against the rest".[61]

The second category was the targeted assassination of prominent public figures who were thought to slander Islam. The most important case was the murder of Theo van Gogh by Mohammed Bouyeri. As has been mentioned in the introduction to this chapter, Bouyeri shot and murdered Van Gogh on the morning of 2 November 2004.[62] On Van Gogh's body, he left a letter to Ayaan Hirsi Ali, with whom Van Gogh had cooperated on the controversial film *Submission*. In this letter, strangely devoid of references to Theo van Gogh, Bouyeri accused Hirsi Ali of waging a crusade against Islam.[63] Although Bouyeri did not explicitly threaten Hirsi Ali in his letter, it was widely believed that the VVD-politician might well be the Hofstad Group's next victim.[64] Another attack plan against public figures was drawn up by Samir Azzouz. He kept a list of prominent Dutch politicians from all over the political spectrum, and appears to have wanted to kill them in an attack in which he planned to use firearms. Shortly after arresting Azzouz, the police found guns and ammunition in his house, and there was evidence that Soumaya Sahla, a member of the Hofstad Group, tried to get the addresses of several well-known politicians through her sister, who worked at a pharmacist where some of the intended victims were customers.[65] Another planned attack, although the details are still sketchy, was to be carried out in Portugal, where three members of the Hofstad Group were arrested in 2004, shortly before the European Championship football. The AIVD suspected that the group was planning an attack on the Portuguese Prime Minister Manuel

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[61] Y. Kaddouri, Yehya Kaddouri over zijn deradicalisatie, interview by J. Pauw and P. Witteman, 05:48 – 05:51, accessed March 28, 2013, http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=af15ZYazQfs.

[62] "Theo van Gogh Vermoord (video)."

[63] M. Bouyeri, "Open Brief Aan Hirshi Ali," accessed July 8, 2013, http://vorige.nrc.nl/krant/article1584015.ece.

[64] R. de Wijk, *Het Stelsel Bewaken En Beveiligen Na Pim Fortuyn* (The: HCSS, 2012), 23.

[65] "Hofstadgroep Zocht via Apotheek Adressen VVD'ers," *Volkskrant*, July 19, 2005, http://www.volkskrant.nl/vk/nl/2686/Binnenland/article/detail/686473/2005/07/19/Hofstadgroep-zocht-via-apotheek-adressen-VVD-rsquo-ers.dhtml.

Barosso and tipped off the Portuguese police. The three were subsequently arrested and deported back to the Netherlands. Portuguese authorities later claimed that some twenty jihadists were planning an attack against Barroso, but they did not have enough evidence to charge the Hofstad Group members with terrorist or other offences.[66]

Third, there have been some plans to carry out attacks on infrastructure. In these cases the targets were not so much chosen because of a symbolic value or a clear association with a perceived enemy of Islam, but rather because of the social disruption the attacks would cause. Samir Azzouz appears to have considered attacks against such targets as Schiphol Airport and the nuclear reactor near the southern town of Borssele.[67] As goes for many of Azzouz's plans, however, it is hard to tell whether he was really serious, or whether it was more a matter of mere posturing to impress other movement members, and possibly himself. In any case, the court ruled, after an initial acquittal, that Azzouz had terrorist intentions and sentenced him to four years in prison.[68]

What is striking about the planned attacks in all three categories is that they display a strong focus on domestic politics, which is quite typical for the Dutch jihadist movement.[69] Almost all jihadist terrorist attacks in Europe in the period 2004-2011 were carried out in attempts to punish national governments for military presence in Iraq or Afghanistan or to protest against slanderous depictions of Mohammed, most prominently the drawings of the Danish cartoonist Kurt Westergaard.[70] Among Dutch

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[66] "Barroso Was Doel Aanslag Tijdens EK," *Volkskrant*, November 16, 2004, http://www.volkskrant.nl/vk/nl/2686/Binnenland/article/detail/711058/2004/11/16/Barroso-was-doel-aanslag-tijdens-EK.dhtml.

[67] "Portret Samir A.," *NOS*, February 20, 2007, http://nos.nl/artikel/121985-portret-samir-a.html.

[68] F. Gevers, "Hof Veroordeelt Samir A. Tot 4 Jaar Cel," *Algemeen Dagblad*, September 7, 2007, http://www.ad.nl/ad/nl/1012/Nederland/article/detail/2229848/2007/09/17/Hof-veroordeelt-Samir-A-tot-4-jaar-cel.dhtml.

[69] *De Gewelddadige Jihad in Nederland*, 28; Vidino, "The Hofstad Group," 584–585.

[70] T. van Dongen, *Jihadistisch Terroristische Aanslagen in de EU, 2004-2011: Onderzoek Naar Complexiteit, Daderkarakteristieken En de Relatie Daartussen* (The Hague: The Hague Centre for Strategic Studies, 2012), 76.

jihadists, such internationalist motives appeared to have played less of a role in the selection of targets. Exceptions were the planned attack on Barroso and the scheme hatched by Kaddouri. The latter considered an attack on the Israeli embassy because he wanted to punish Israel for the way they treated the Palestinians.[71] Barroso is believed to have been a target because of his support for the western military presence in Iraq.[72]

8.3 Counterterrorism principles and jihadist terrorism in the Netherlands

8.3.1 Law enforcement and direct action

After the Van Gogh murder the police quickly moved in on the Hofstad Group. As the AIVD knew the Hofstad Group well (see also the section on gathering intelligence), identifying and arresting its members was relatively easy. The only operational obstacle the police encountered, was the fight put up by Jason Walters and Ismail Akhnikh. About a week after the Van Gogh murder, a police unit sent out to arrest Walters and Akhnikh tried to force their way into the house in The Hague where the two lived. Walters and Akhnikh, however, fought back and entrenched themselves. Walters even threw a hand grenade. After a siege of some fourteen hours, a special forces unit raided the apartment and arrested the two men.[73]

But while apprehending the core members of the Hofstad Group and the cell around Samir Azzouz was easy, securing convictions proved decidedly more difficult. As for the Hofstad Group, the public prosecutor

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[71] Kaddouri, Yehya Kaddouri over zijn deradicalisatie, 5:28 – 5:50.

[72] "Dutch Radical Islamic Group Planned Euro 2004 Attack in Portugal: Police," *EU Business*, November 16, 2004, http://www.eubusiness.com/europe/netherlands/041115125514.y4jlotmg.

[73] "Laakkwartier Dag in Greep Terreur," *Trouw*, November 11, 2004, http://www.trouw.nl/tr/nl/4324/Nieuws/archief/article/detail/1743402/2004/11/11/Laakkwartier-dag-in-greep-terreur.dhtml; "Jason W. Bekent Gooien Granaat," *Trouw*, December 9, 2005, http://www.trouw.nl/tr/nl/4324/Nieuws/article/detail/1554214/2005/12/09/Jason-W-bekent-gooien-granaat.dhtml.

had difficulty getting the fourteen group members convicted for membership of a terrorist organisation. In the first court case, the judge ruled that nine of the fourteen members had indeed formed a terrorist organisation, but this verdict was overturned in January 2008, when the Court of Justice in The Hague ruled that the Hofstad Group was not an organisation as understood under Dutch law.[74] It was not until late 2010, after the Supreme Court had ruled that the definition of 'organisation' that had been used, was too narrow and that the case had to be brought before a court again, that the conviction for membership of a terrorist organisation was finally secured.[75]

There were also hiccups in the trials of Samir Azzouz, even though he was probably the most prolific member of the Dutch jihadi movement (he even tried to plan an attack while in prison).[76] The first time he was arrested, in 2003, he was released soon afterwards because of a lack of evidence.[77] He was arrested a second time in 2004, for involvement in an armed robbery of the supermarket where he worked. But when the police searched his house, they found evidence of more sinister plans. Azzouz had purchased bomb making materials and had printed maps of what were thought to be targets for a terrorist attack.[78] He was charged with preparation of a terrorist attack, but was not found guilty because of the

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[74] J. Groen and A. Kranenberg, "Hofstadgroep Vrijgesproken van Terrorisme," *Volkskrant*, accessed March 29, 2013, http://www.volkskrant.nl/vk/nl/2686/Binnenland/article/detail/883719/2008/01/23/Hofstadgroep-vrijgesproken-van-terrorisme.dhtml.

[75] Vermaat, "Hoe Hofstadgroep Toch Terroristisch Bleek."

[76] L. Boon, "Samir A. in Cel Aangehouden Wegens Voorbereidingen Aanslag," *NRC*, September 20, 2012, http://www.nrc.nl/nieuws/2012/09/20/samir-a-in-cel-aangehouden-wegens-voorbereidingen-aanslag/.

[77] J. Alberts and S. Derix, "Hoe Georganiseerd Waren Samir A. En Zijn Vrienden?," *NRC Handelsblad*, April 9, 2005, http://vorige.nrc.nl/dossiers/moslimterreur/daders_verdachten_terroristen_t/article1862216.ece/Hoe_georganiseerd_waren_Samir_A._en_zijn_vrienden.

[78] K. Bessems, "Samir A. Voor de Rechter," *Trouw*, April 24, 2005, http://www.trouw.nl/tr/nl/4324/Nieuws/archief/article/detail/1731621/2005/02/24/Samir-A-voor-de-rechter.dhtml.

rudimentary nature of his plans and resources.[79] Only after an appeal by the public prosecutor in 2007, and after he had been arrested for the third time and had been tried for another terrorist plot, was he convicted of preparing a terrorist attack with an improvised explosive device.[80] The third time he was arrested, he was charged and found guilty of plotting the murder of several prominent Dutch politicians. In this so-called Piranha-case, several of Azzouz's accomplices received jail sentences as well.[81] All in all, some fifteen of the most active members of the Dutch jihadist movement were in jail by 2006, even though in some cases their conviction was not yet final.

Another important branch of Dutch counterterrorism aimed at removing members of the jihadist movement from Dutch society was the deportation of several foreigners who played leading roles as religious mentors.[82] Details are hard to come by, but between 2006 and 2012, 31 foreigners were deported to their countries of origin because the AIVD deemed them a threat to Dutch national security.[83] Together with the arrests mentioned in the previous paragraphs, the expulsions dealt a heavy blow to the jihadist movement in the Netherlands.

As early as 2006 the jihadist movement started to fall apart. The Hofstad Group as well as other cells were torn apart by leadership crises and conflicts about the direction the movement should take.[84] As we have seen above, authority figures in the Dutch jihadist movement often had

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[79] "Terreurverdachte Samir A. Opnieuw Vrijgesproken (video)," *Nu.nl*, November 18, 2005, http://www.nu.nl/algemeen/628140/terreurverdachte-samir-a-opnieuw-vrijgesproken-video.html.

[80] "Hof Veroordeelt Samir A. Tot 4 Jaar Met Aftrek van Voorarrest" (Ressortsparket Amsterdam, September 17, 2007), http://www.om.nl/onderwerpen/@127768/hof_veroordeelt/.

[81] "Negen Jaar Cel Voor Terrorist Samir A.," *Nu.nl*, oktober 2008, http://www.nu.nl/algemeen/1771027/negen-jaar-cel-voor-terrorist-samir-a.html.

[82] *Lokale Jihadistisch Netwerken in Nederland: Veranderingen in Het Dreigingsbeeld* (The Hague: AIVD, 2010), 7.

[83] *Samenvatting Dreigingsbeeld Terrorisme Nederland 28* (The Hague: NCTV, 2012), 6.

[84] *Jaarverslag 2006* (The Hague: AIVD, 2007), 33.

religious expertise or practical experience in waging jihad. A sizable part of them were foreigners, and their expulsion left a power vacuum in the movement that has never been adequately filled. In many cases the expelled foreigners were older, leading cell members who played roles similar to that of Redouan al Issa in the Hofstad Group. They were religious mentors and authority figures that kept the movement together, and their removal from the scene severely undermined the movement's cohesion. Some movement members reportedly tried to claim a leadership role, sometimes through force and intimidation, but these attempts were generally unsuccessful. With the leading members imprisoned or expelled, there was no one left to mobilise the movement's resources for violent actions, and no one to settle the many conflicts about religion, and strategy and tactics.[85] Deprived of the actors that had the authority to give direction to the movement's activities, many contacts between movement members returned to what they had entailed before. Instead of interacting with each other as members of a jihadist cell, movement members now interacted as friends, family members or acquaintances. In a way, the networks were still there, but its members no longer acted on a common political or religious agenda.[86]

The lack of political direction quickly translated in a decrease of the level of jihadist activity in the Netherlands. The AIVD initially made mention of a second generation of Hofstad Group members[87], but as it turned out, the successors to Bouyeri and Azzouz lacked the wherewithal to plan, let alone carry out, even one terrorist attack. The pattern of decreasing jihadist activity continued into 2007, and by 2008, the AIVD was ready to speak of the "neutralisation" of autonomous networks in the Netherlands.[88] In 2010, the AIVD stated that jihadist terrorism was no longer a priority.[89] Whatever jihadist activity that was left, was aimed at

[85] *Lokale Jihadistische Netwerken in Nederland*, 11.

[86] Ibid., 7.

[87] *De Gewelddadige Jihad in Nederland*, 41–42.

[88] *Jaarverslag 2006*, 33; *Jaarverslag 2008*, 21.

[89] *Jaarverslag 2009* (The Hague: AIVD, 2010), 15; *Jaarverslag 2010* (The Hague: AIVD, 2011), 9.

facilitating jihadist travel to the Arab world, instead of at committing attacks on targets in the Netherlands.[90] The notion of a decrease in jihadist activity is corroborated by what is known about terrorist plots, or the absence thereof, in the Netherlands after 2006. First, no jihadist attacks or attack plans have come to light since 2006. Second, the convictions for terrorism-related offences after 2006 all concerned suspects who were in some way linked to the Hofstad Group or the Piranha-case, which means that they committed their terrorist offences in 2006 at the latest. Furthermore, of the 106 terrorism-related police investigations that were initiated in the period 2007-2011, many were dropped after it turned out that there was no evidence for terrorist activity. In other cases there was indeed a political motive, but certainly not all of these cases had to do with jihadism. Animal rights extremism, threats to politicians and the royal family, and racism and right-wing extremism account for a considerable part of the 106 investigations.[91]

Given the Dutch jihadist movement's inability to plan even one attack, it is clear that their operational capabilities were eroded under the pressure of the arrests. In 2005, there was a serious chance that the Netherlands would be struck by a terrorist attack from a home grown jihadist. In 2007, this threat was no longer a priority for the AIVD. As this decline can be linked to the repressive counterterrorism interventions mentioned in this section, we can consider the fate of the Dutch jihadist movement a validation of the programme theory about law enforcement and direct action. But the police and judicial action against the Hofstad Group cannot be considered in isolation. A crucial element in the arrests and the convictions of the Hofstad Group was accurate intelligence.

[90] *Jaarverslag 2011* (The Hague: AIVD, 2012), 12.

[91] B. van Gestel, C.J. de Poot, and R.F. Kouwenberg, *De Wet Opsporing Terroristische Misdrijven Drie Jaar in Werking* (The Hague: WODC, 2010), 11; B. van Gestel et al., *Opsporing van Terrorisme in de Praktijk: De Wet Opsporing Terroristische Misdrijven Vier Jaar in Werking* (The Hague: WODC, 2012), 56.

8.3.2 Gathering intelligence

The arrests mentioned and the previous section, and the consequent decline of the jihadist movement in the Netherlands, would not have been possible without the intelligence gathered by the Dutch intelligence and security service AIVD. From very early on, much was known about the Hofstad Group and the cell around Samir Azzouz, and in many arrests, the police acted on information provided by the AIVD. It is true that the Dutch jihadist movement was larger than just the Hofstad Group, which overlapped with the cell around Azzouz, but much less is known about intelligence efforts directed at other cells, perhaps because their attack plans were not as numerous and serious as those of the Hofstad Group. The argument made in this section is mostly built around the results of the intelligence gathering regarding the Hofstad Group and the cell around Samir Azzouz. This does suggest a bias, but as there were hardly any serious attack plans by other cells, these were also less important as intelligence targets.

The AIVD first caught sight of what it would call the Hofstad Group in 2002. The first arrests occurred in October 2003, but the suspects had to be released, as there was not enough evidence to charge them with terrorist offences. The Hofstad Group now knew they were being watched, and started behaving in a more conspiratorial manner, which made it harder for the AIVD to follow them. In the course of 2004, however, the secret service regained its hold on the movement.[92] It was known where the group met, and by staking out the homes that were most frequently used for gatherings, the AIVD learned about the group's membership. It also knew the roles played by various members. For instance, the AIVD knew that Redouan al Issa was a religious mentor and that Mohammed Bouyeri was a propagandist and a facilitator, who allowed other group members to use his house and car for the network's activities.[93] The secret service

[92] CTIVD, *Toezichtsrapport Inzake de Afwegingsprocessen van de AIVD Met Betrekking Tot Mohammed B.*, 8–9.

[93] J.P.H. Donner and J.W. Remkes, "De Moord Op de Heer Th. van Gogh," Tweede Kamer, vergaderjaar 2004–2005, 29 854, nr.3, (November 10, 2004), 20; J.W. Remkes, "Evaluatie Overheidsoptreden Rondom de Moord Op de Heer Th. van Gogh," December 12, 2006, 5.

also knew about the jihadist travels of Jason Walters and Ismail Akhnikh.[94] Also, even though they fatally misjudged the threat that emanated from Bouyeri, the AIVD had detailed information about the radicalisation process that the man who would later murder Theo van Gogh had been going through.[95]

As for Samir Azzouz, he had been an intelligence target since 2003, when the then sixteen-year-old was trying to make his way to Chechnya to join the jihad against the Russian army.[96] From then on Azzouz was on the intelligence service's radar. He even claimed that one day, as he was riding on the subway, an investigating officer sat next to him, identified himself and said: "We're watching you."[97] This may have been an attempt on Azzouz's part to embellish his record as a jihadist, but it is true that he was under constant surveillance, not only of the AIVD, but also of the Criminal Intelligence Unit (*Criminele Inlichtingeneenheid*, CIE).[98] Also, it is known that the government did have a policy of following terrorist suspects in such a way that the suspects would be aware that they were being followed, which would make it impossible for them to participate in terrorist plots.[99] Another prominent intelligence target was Nouredine el-Fathni, an associate of Azzouz's. He fled the country after the Van Gogh murder, but was closely followed after he returned. By not immediately calling for el-Fathni's arrest, the AIVD was able to learn about the involvement of Martine van den Oever, a Dutch convert, and Soumaya Sahla, el-Fathni's wife in an Islamic marriage that was not recognised under Dutch law. The AIVD then tapped Sahla's phone, and learned

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[94] B. Nijpels and J. Slats, "Hofstadgroep," *Profiel* (KRO, November 30, 2005), 27:04 – 27:40, http://tvblik.nl/profiel-1/hofstadgroep.

[95] See e.g. Donner and Remkes, "De Moord Op de Heer Th. van Gogh," 22.

[96] S. Derix and J. Alberts, "AIVD Houdt Samir A. Al Jaren in de Gaten," *NRC*, October 15, 2005, http://vorige.nrc.nl/dossiers/moslimterreur/daders_verdachten_terroristen_t/article1639523.ece.

[97] Eikelenboom, *Niet Bang Om Te Sterven*, 42.

[98] Ibid., 51–52.

[99] *Antiterrorismemaatregelen in Nederland in Het Eerste Decennium van de 21e Eeuw*, 89.

about her attempts to get the home addresses of the victims on the hit list.[100]

How exactly the AIVD knew all this, is, of course, not entirely clear, but it appears that, besides the phone taps and the stakeouts, the agency had a mole in the Hofstad Group. Samir Azzouz had his suspicions, and claimed the Hofstad Group was compromised by an AIVD infiltrator, and that it was someone with whom he worked closely. There were only two people, other than himself, who knew about the maps of potential targets he kept. Azzouz accused Saleh B., a little-known member of the Dutch jihadist movement and one of the two people who knew about the maps, of briefing the AIVD.[101] Jason Walters, too, claimed that Saleh B. worked for the AIVD. According to Walters, B. got in touch with a jihadist group in Pakistan that would train Walters and Akhnikh and bought the plane tickets. It is hard to find irrefutable evidence that Walters was right, but the presence of an informer would explain how it was possible that the AIVD knew Walters' flight schedule. When Walters arrived at Schiphol after his second trip to Pakistan, he was immediately whisked away by the AIVD for interrogation.[102] In 2006 a report of the Commission for Oversight on the Intelligence and Security Services (*Commissie van Toezicht op de Inlichtingen- en Veiligheidsdiensten*, CTIVD), the government organisation that oversees the activities of the AIVD, indicated, although without mentioning Saleh B. by name, that there had indeed been a mole in the Hofstad Group.[103]

Another important source of intelligence was a recording device that was placed in the living room of the house where Jason Walters and Ismail Akhnikh lived. While it gained the AIVD a treasure trove of information

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[100] Vermaat, *De Hofstadgroep*, 125.

[101] "Samir A.: AIVD-Informant in Hofstadgroep," *Volkskrant*, December 21, 2005, http://www.volkskrant.nl/vk/nl/2686/Binnenland/article/detail/686725/2005/12/21/Samir-A-AIVD-informant-in-Hofstadgroep.dhtml.

[102] Nijpels and Slats, "Hofstadgroep," 27:04 – 27:40.

[103] *Toezichtsrapport Inzake Het Onderzoek van de Commissie van Toezicht Naar de Rechtmatigheid van de Uitvoering van Een Contra-Terrorisme Operatie van de AIVD* (The Hague: CTIVD, 2006).

that was later used in the group members' court cases, the bugging also brought the AIVD some disrepute. The police later claimed that the AIVD had learned from the recorded conversations that Walters and Akhnikh were armed and dangerous, and were prepared for a police raid. Instead of sharing this vital piece of information with the police, the secret service, according to accusations by the police, kept it to itself.[104] As a result, the police unit that came to arrest the two on 10 November 2004 underestimated the risks involved in the operation, and were overwhelmed by the use of firearms and a hand grenade.[105] The plot thickened further when several media reported that Saleh B. had supplied Walters with the grenade that wounded three police officers during the siege that preceded his arrest.[106]

This incident and the underestimation of Bouyeri severely dented the image of the AIVD, which was blamed for Van Gogh's death as well as the casualties resulting from the operation against Walters and Akhnikh. Nevertheless, as the examples listed in the preceding paragraphs should have made clear, the AIVD had lots of detailed information about the Hofstad Group. And what is more, it not only managed to find intelligence sources, such as the informer and the recording device in the house in the Antheunisstraat in The Hague, it also passed this information on to the police, which arrested many Hofstad Group members before any attack plans could be carried out. It was intelligence about their trip

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[104] "Politiebond ACP Verbijsterd over Conversatie in Terreurpand," *NovaTV*, October 29, 2005, http://www.novatv.nl/page/detail/nieuws/8229/Politiebond+ACP+verbijsterd+over+conversatie+in+terreurpand.

[105] Eikelenboom, *Niet Bang Om Te Sterven*, 31.

[106] "'AIVD-Informant Leverde Handgranaat Laakkwartier,'" *Volkskrant*, October 28, 2005, http://www.volkskrant.nl/vk/nl/2686/Binnenland/article/detail/674603/2005/10/28/lsquo-AIVD-informant-leverde-handgranaat-Laakkwartier.dhtml. Saleh B. denied his involvement in the delivery of the hand granades, and Interior Minister Johan Remkes claimed that the AIVD had not known of, let alone supplied, the hand granades. J. Groen and A. Kranenberg, "Saleh B. Blijft Leveren Handgranaat Ontkennen," *Volkskrant*, December 13, 2005, 2013/7/8; "'AIVD Wist Niets van Granaat in Laakkwartier,'" *Trouw*, November 4, 2005, http://www.trouw.nl/tr/nl/4324/Nieuws/article/detail/1559404/2005/11/04/AIVD-wist-niets-van-granaat-in-Laakkwartier.dhtml.

to Portugal in 2004 that led to the arrest of the Hofstad Group members suspected of having planned an attack against Barroso. Similarly, it was on the basis of AIVD intelligence about Azzouz's plans and about the phone calls by Sahla that their plot could be thwarted. El-Fathni, too, was arrested on illegal possession firearms after he had been followed by intelligence officers. In other words, the output did lead to the desired effect: the Hofstad Group's capacity for violence was undermined by the AIVD's ability to keep the cell under surveillance.

8.3.3 Addressing root causes

The notion of root causes played an important role in Dutch post-9/11 counterterrorism. Many in the Netherlands believed that factors like discrimination and the lack of a clear cultural identity, or rather the incompatibility of two cultural identities, drove disenfranchised Muslim youths to terrorism. This idea that underlying socio-economic factors acted as drivers of a terrorist threat and therefore needed to be addressed, was the basis of the Action Plan Polarisation and Radicalisation (*Actieplan Polarisatie en Radicalisering*), which ran from 2007 to 2011. The idea behind the Action Plan was that social exclusion was the root cause of radicalisation and eventually of terrorism.[107] Giving potential radicals a stake in society, i.e. a job, a house, an education, would remove the incentive for radical action. As a result, potential radicals would turn away from radical ideas, and would not support, let alone join, jihadist networks.[108] The objectives of the Action Plan were threefold.[109] First,

[107] While some government officials will claim that the Action Plan Polarisation and Radicalisation was not entirely or primarily intended as a counterterrorism instrument, the plan says that radicalisation must be stopped because it can lead to terrorism. See *Actieplan Polarisatie En Radicalisering 2007-2011* (The Hague: Ministerie van Binnenlandse Zaken en Koninkrijksrelaties, 2007), 5. Moreover, it was mentioned in the progress reports of the National Coordinator of Counterterrorism as part of Dutch counterterrorism policy. See "Elfde Voortgangsrapportage Terrorismebestrijding" (Nationaal Coördinator Terrorismebestrijding, December 15, 2009), 2. While it may not have been counterterrorism in the very narrow sense that its measures were not intended to directly impact on terrorists, it was clearly a way to prevent the emergence of new radicals and terrorists. For this reason, we will consider it an application of the counterterrorism principle 'addressing root causes'.

[108] L. Vidino, "A Preliminary Assessment of Counter-Radicalization in the Netherlands," *CTC Sentinel* 1, no. 9 (2008): 18.

[109] *Actieplan Polarisatie En Radicalisering 2007-2011*, 7.

potential radicals had to be drawn back into society, meaning that they had to be convinced that participation in mainstream society had advantages over a life at the radical fringes. Second, the Action Plan set out to teach professionals involved how to recognise radicalisation. Police officers, teachers, social workers and other professionals who were likely to encounter radicalising youths were instructed on how a radicalisation process evolved and what behavioural characteristics are displayed by someone who is going through such a process.[110] The third main objective was the marginalisation and isolation of actors spreading radical messages. This was a more repressive strand, and included the shutting down of websites with radical content.

The implementation of the Action Plan took the form of projects that were carried out under the auspices of local governments. The projects under the Action Plan were financed by the Ministry of the Interior and Kingdom Relations, which had to approve of each project before allocating the Action Plan's financial resources.[111] Some of these projects took a more collective approach to countering polarisation and radicalisation. Several cities, for example, organised cultural manifestations and hosted public debates about religious issues. Other projects were targeted at individuals and helped at-risk youths getting a home and a job or an education. In some cases these approaches included a mentor to talk the subject out of any radical ideas.[112] By and large the projects that were completed under the aegis of the Action Plan Polarisation and Radicalisation, achieved their targets, but this should not be mistaken for effectiveness. The targets that are meant here are the direct results that the projects set out to produce. For instance, an outreach programme could meet its target by bringing its message to the attention of the number of high school students that the project plan had stipulated should take note of the project's message. Similarly, professionals who received training could be observed to be more

[110] J. Brandon and L. Vidino, "European Experiences in Counter-Radicalisation," *CTC Sentinel* 5, no. 6 (2012): 18.

[111] Guldener and Potman, *Vijf Jaar Lokale Projecten Polarisatie En Radicalisering*, 18.

[112] Ibid., 16.

knowledgeable about radicalisation, and more aware of its indicators. Also, there are indications that high school students who participated in one of the projects thought and spoke in a more nuanced way about sensitive issues regarding culture and religion.[113] Whether or not this eliminated a root cause of a terrorist threat is an entirely different matter.

That the effect of the Action Plan on the jihadist cells was negligible, is clear from the chronology of events. It will be recalled that the AIVD claimed to have neutralised the threat from local, autonomous jihadist networks in 2008. Given the fact that the Action Plan was presented in late August 2007 and no funding had yet been assigned to projects until 2008, there is no reason to assume that the decline of the jihadist movement had anything to do with the Action Plan. The decline of the jihadist movement was brought about by repressive means, not by measures on the 'softer' end of the counterterrorism spectrum. One could still argue that the projects under the Action Plan possibly kept some people from adopting radical views, but this is unlikely given the flawed assumptions on which the Action Plan was based.

First, at least going by what is known about the Hofstad Group, the focus on socio-economic deprivation as the driving force behind radicalisation was misguided. Many in the Netherlands thought that factors like discrimination and the lack of a clear cultural identity drove disenfranchised youths to terrorism[114], but this analysis is not borne out by the profiles of the country's best-known terrorists. In some cases, most prominently that of Mohammed Bouyeri, the problem was not so much that he was socially excluded, but rather that he was a deeply disturbed

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[113] Ibid., 108–111.

[114] See for example "'Woede over Achterstelling Drijfveer Terroristen,'" *Algemeen Dagblad*, December 19, 2005, http://www.ad.nl/ad/nl/1012/Nederland/article/detail/2395608/2005/12/19/Woede-over-achterstelling-drijfveer-terroristen.dhtml; "D66 Wil Onderzoek Naar Terrorismebestrijding," *Trouw*, January 17, 2007, http://www.trouw.nl/tr/nl/4324/Nieuws/article/detail/1345740/2007/01/17/D66-wil-onderzoek-naar-terrorismebestrijding.dhtml; *Uitgangspunten Bij de Aanpak van Terrorisme in Amsterdam* (Amsterdam: Gemeente Amsterdam, Directie Openbare Orde en Veiligheid, 2004), 9.

individual. He had an education and had been active in a community centre in the neighbourhood where he lived, but this did not keep him from frequently getting into fistfights, on more than one occasion with the police.[115] What is more, his writings of the same period were permeated with cruelty and blood thirst. Addressing the King of Morocco, for instance, Bouyeri once wrote: "Know that it is my biggest wish to see how your chest is cracked open and your raw, beating heart is torn out of your body and then to see how death seizes your rotten soul to drag it to Hell while you're screaming and struggling".[116] CD-ROMs found in his apartment after the Van Gogh murder contained scenes of torture, genital mutilation, and necrophilia.[117] Other members of the Hofstad Group may have been less extreme, but the group as a whole did display a certain fascination for gore. Several members, especially Bouyeri and Nouredine el-Fathni, possessed large amounts of footage of beheadings, torture and rape.[118] Group members often watched such materials during sessions in living rooms, at which they also discussed religion and jihad.[119]

These living room sessions bring us to another element that was overlooked by the Action Plan Polarisation & Radicalisation. As has been argued above, peer pressure was an important factor in the development of the willingness to commit terrorist attacks. The sense of belonging to a group played a role in keeping members in the Hofstad Group. As former Hofstad Group member Nouredine el-Fathni explained after his release

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[115] CTIVD, *Toezichtsrapport Inzake de Afwegingsprocessen van de AIVD Met Betrekking Tot Mohammed B.*, 12–14; Donner and Remkes, "De Moord Op de Heer Th. van Gogh," 3.

[116] M. Bouyeri, "To Catch a Wolf," 2004, http://www.dutch.faithfreedom.org/forum/viewtopic.php?p=38869.

[117] Vermaat, *De Hofstadgroep*, 54–55.

[118] A. Vermaat, "Weer Hoge Straffen Geëist Tegen Leden Hofstadgroep," *Trouw*, November 15, 2007, http://www.trouw.nl/tr/nl/4324/Nieuws/archief/article/detail/1675420/2007/11/15/Weer-hoge-straffen-geeist-tegen-leden-Hofstadgroep.dhtml; "'Ze Gaven Me Veel Filmpjes van Onthoofdingen.'"

[119] "'Hofstadgroep', Deelneming Aan Een (terroristische) Criminele Organisatie" (Gerechtshof Amsterdam, December 17, 2010), http://www.juridischkennisportaal.nl/wiki/strafrecht/criminele-organisatie/-hofstadgroep-deelneming-aan-een-terroristische-criminele-organisatie.htm.

from jail: "It wasn't just faith that tied us together. It's a feeling of unity, sociability, solidarity."[120] There was also a competitive element to the group dynamic. Cell members did not want to be outdone by their peers, and pushed themselves, and consequently the group, to degrees of radicalisation that they may never have reached individually. In the previous sections we have seen that Jason Walters explained after his arrest that he had wanted to impress the other group members with his radical ideas.[121]

The Action Plan Polarisation and Radicalisation was a mismatch with the radicalisation that took place in the Dutch jihadist scene, as it addressed a large group of people, yet failed to take into account the importance of group dynamics in radicalisation. The idea was that one's socio-economic position determined the way a potential radical saw the world. Once any problems in this regard were fixed, a given individual would not fall for radical ideas. As the experiences of the members of the Hofstad Group show, however, radical ideas can also form as a result of peer pressure and the desire to belong to a group. The Dutch counter-radicalisation policy ignored this dimension of radicalisation and gave little thought to the importance of social context in the formation of one person's radical views. The preceding paragraphs have shown that views may change under the influence of other people, which can also explain why members of the Dutch jihadist movement did not meet the profile of the deprived, poor outcast who could be expected to hold a grudge against society. It is true that many in the movement were unemployed and had little education, but there were also many who did have a job and who had attended higher vocational training or a university.[122] Samir Azzouz, for

[120] M. Willems, "De Hofstadgroep Spreekt in NRC," *NRC Handelsblad*, September 10, 2011, http://www.nrc.nl/nieuws/2011/09/10/de-hofstadgroep-spreekt-in-nrc/.

[121] "Jason W. Typeert Zichzelf Als Vrij Naïef."

[122] Poot and Sonnenschein, *Jihadistisch Terrorisme in Nederland*, 134.

instance, was enrolled in a programme to become a laboratory assistant, and Jason Walters' brother Jermaine worked at a bakery.[123]

But the government's misunderstanding of jihadist radicalisation in the Netherlands was not limited to the nature of the problem. The scale was misread as well. The Action Plan was based on the fear that there was a fertile ground for radical ideas among Muslims in the Netherlands. The polarisation between Muslims and non-Muslims would make the former more susceptible to radical ideas and more supportive of terrorism, so the logic went. By 2008, however, it had become clear that this was simply not true. Polarisation had not diminished, but neither had it bred terrorism. In mosques there was a non-violent discourse, and even the salafist ones, spoke out against violence and refused radicals and extremists access to their gatherings. Also, after mutual trust had been built, heads of mosques or Islamic schools alerted local police officers to possible cases of radicalisation.[124] Particularly instructive was the reaction of Muslim communities to *Fitna*, a documentary made by Geert Wilders in which he criticised Islam for what he felt was its inherent inclination to violence. The country braced itself for a fierce reaction to what Muslims would consider outrageous blasphemy, but the response from the Dutch Muslim communities was remarkably moderate. While they showed little sympathy for Wilders' project, several Muslim organisations called on their constituencies to defend Islam only by peaceful means. There was little violent protest upon the documentary's release, and there was no visible increase in the support for jihadist networks.[125]

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[123] J. Alberts and S. Derix, " 'Hofstadgroep Volgde 'S Nachts Trainingen,'" *NRC Handelsblad*, February 3, 2005, http://vorige.nrc.nl/dossiers/moslimterreur/daders_verdachten_terroristen_t/article1859991.ece; "Samir A. Hoort Strafeis in Hoger Beroep," *Trouw*, November 5, 2005, http://www.trouw.nl/tr/nl/4324/Nieuws/article/detail/1560896/2005/11/07/Samir-A-hoort-strafeis-in-hoger-beroep.dhtml.

[124] Author's interview with Dirk van der Blom (KLPD), 4 April 2013.

[125] "Achtste Voortgangsrapportage Terrorismebestrijding" (Nationaal Coördinator Terrorismebestrijding, June 9, 2008), 3–4. In Utrecht, the movie triggered a small riot. See N. de Kruijff, "Auto's in Brand Bij Rellen Om Fitna," *Algemeen Dagblad*, March 28, 2008, http://www.ad.nl/ad/nl/1039/Utrecht/article/detail/2166676/2008/03/28/Auto-rsquo-s-in-brand-bij-rellen-om-Fitna.dhtml.

That the jihadist movement stood alone in its acceptance of violence is also clear from the position taken by salafist mosques. Even fundamentalist imams who warned their followers against integration into Dutch society, were not supportive of terrorism. Before 2007, salafist mosques had turned a blind eye to recruitment of jihadists among their constituencies, but around 2007 and 2008 they began to put a stop to such practices.[126] Furthermore, they invested in a new, younger generation of preachers, some of whom preached in Dutch and could thus reach the second and third generation immigrants, who rarely spoke Arab. They also agreed with the AIVD and the NCTb to keep a low profile after *Fitna* so as not to provoke a violent backlash from their congregations. Although this shift towards a less accommodating stance vis-à-vis jihadism was probably informed by the assessment that allowing recruitment and the spreading of extremist messages would generate bad publicity, later research showed that the majority of salafists in the Netherlands do not propagate or advocate the use of violence.[127]

What this brief survey of attitudes of Dutch Muslims shows, is that the jihadist movement was a small and isolated minority without any political leverage. There were no demonstrations for the jihadist cause, and no political party or mosques, perhaps with the exception of the As Sunnah mosque in The Hague and the Al Tahweed mosque in Amsterdam, that could be used as a vehicle for jihadist politics. There was very little openly expressed support for the jihadist movement, and few propounded even a moderate version of the jihadist creed. Also, the swift collapse of the jihadist movement after the arrests or expulsion of some fifty people (see the section on direct action) shows that the movement was not deeply embedded in a supportive social environment. All this suggests a major flaw in the logic underlying the Action Plan Polarisation and Radicalisation. Contrary to what the makers of the plan assumed, there was no fertile ground for supporters and recruits for the jihadist

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[126] *Weerstand En Tegenkracht: Actuele Trends En Ontwikkelingen van Het Salafisme in Nederland* (The Hague: AIVD, 2009), 5.

[127] Ibid., 7–8; I. Roex, S. van Stiphout, and J. Tillie, *Salafisme in Nederland: Aard, Omvang En Dreiging* (Amsterdam: IMES, 2010), 20.

movement. Not all who were in some way socially excluded, were potential radicals, let alone potential terrorists. This being the case, the Action Plan could never have been effective, because it was targeting a potential terrorist support base that did not exist. This notion was not lost on the Dutch government. The Action Plan ended in 2011 and was not extended, also because of the budgetary constraints that the economic crisis had imposed on government spending.[128]

8.3.4 Restraint in the use of force

We have seen above that intelligence and arrests played a crucial role in the quelling of the jihadist terrorist threat in the Netherlands. The post-9/11 period, however, also saw a series of embarrassing mishaps that discredited Dutch counterterrorism. In 2004, for instance, the police in the city of Utrecht arrested an entire family on suspicion of involvement terrorist activities. The arrests were made in plain view of the entire neighbourhood, which made the outcome – the whole thing was a misunderstanding and all arrestees were released without charges – all the more uncomfortable.[129] A somewhat similar false alarm occurred in 2009, when the AIVD had information that pointed to a terrorist attack on an IKEA branch near Amsterdam. The area around the alleged target was closed off, and seven men from Moroccan descent were arrested, only to be released the next day.[130] A third example of a widely publicised misfire was the arrest of twelve Somalians on Christmas Eve 2010. The AIVD claimed to have information that the twelve were planning a terrorist attack, but in this case, too, it soon transpired that there was no evidence of a terrorist attack. Unfortunately, this became clear only after the police had done considerable damage during a raid in the store of one of the twelve men.[131]

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[128] J. Brandon and L. Vidino, *Countering Radicalisation in Europe* (London: ICSR, 2012), 34.

[129] Eikelenboom, *Niet Bang Om Te Sterven*, 84–86.

[130] "Alle Verdachten Terreurdreiging Vrijgelaten," *Nu.nl*, March 13, 2009, http://www.nu.nl/algemeen/1932305/alle-verdachten-terreurdreiging-vrijgelaten.html.

[131] P. van den Dool, "AIVD: Opgepakte Terreurverdachten Wilden Aanslag in Nederland Plegen," December 25, 2010, http://www.nrc.nl/nieuws/2010/12/25/twaalf-somalische-

These are just some examples of overreaction on the part of the police, which in some cases acted on inaccurate intelligence from the AIVD. Overviews by the Dutch newspaper *NRC Handelsblad* and Onjo, a collective of Dutch broadcasting companies, show that in the vast majority of cases, terrorism suspects who were arrested were not convicted. Many were not even charged. According to Onjo, only 2.5% of the 274 people who were arrested on suspicion of terrorist offences were convicted. The *NRC Handelsblad*, which analysed the outcomes of the arrested terrorist suspects between 2001 and 2009, stated that two thirds were released without charges. Also, the conviction rates for terrorist suspect were significantly lower than the overall average for other crimes.[132] As most of the arrestees were second or third generation immigrants, the false alarms fit a pattern, perceived by Dutch Muslims, of discriminatory application of counterterrorism measures.[133] Indeed, polls show that Muslims in the Netherlands, especially second generation immigrants, are considerably more distrustful of the police than Muslims in other European countries.[134] On the local level, the often fragile ties between the police and Muslim communities were indeed strained by false alarms.[135] What is interesting, though, is that the resentment over the misplaced applications of force by the Dutch police never took the form of anything resembling support for jihadist terrorism. They were perceived as discriminatory, but the Dutch jihadist movement failed to capitalise on the widespread discontent about the performance of the police.

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terreurverdachten-opgepakt-in-rotterdam/; F. Vleugel, "Ten Onrechte Verdachte Somaliërs Vinden Schadevergoeding Te Laag," *RTV Rijnmond*, July 19, 2011, http://www.rijnmond.nl/nieuws/19-07-2011/ten-onrechte-verdachte-somaliers-vinden-schadevergoeding-te-laag.

[132] S. Derix and M. Thie, "Verdachten Terreur Zelden Veroordeeld," *NRC*, June 6, 2009, http://vorige.nrc.nl/binnenland/article2263213.ece/Verdachten_terreur_zelden_veroordeeld.

[133] Eijkman, Lettinga, and Verbossen, *Impact of Counterterrorism on Communities*, 31.

[134] *European Union Minorities and Discrimination Survey: Main Results Report* (Brussels: Fundamental Rights Agency, 2009), 213–214.

[135] Author's interview with Dirk van der Blom (KLPD).

The responses to incidents like the ones described above are quite informative in this respect. With regard to the IKEA incident, some speculated that it could lead to a backlash, as it would confirm the jihadists' notion that they were at war with the state.[136] Although there was a response from the Muslim community, there is no evidence that this played into the hand of the jihadist movement. In a moderate response, the Coalition of Dutch Moroccans (*Samenwerkingsverband van Marokkaanse Nederlanders*, SMN) criticised the police for mentioning the suspects' ethnic background to the media.[137] There was, in other words, public indignation, but none of the responses suggested support for radical ideas or for the jihadist movement. The same goes for the arrests of the twenty Somalians. There were protests from the Somalian community in the Netherlands, but these were limited in scope.[138] A final example of the way Muslim communities responded to police force occurred in the Amsterdam neighbourhood of Slotervaart, incidentally also the neighbourhood where Mohammed B. had lived. This case is not related to counterterrorism, but is nevertheless instructive as to the way police force is perceived in Muslim communities in the Netherlands. In October 2007 Bilal Bajaka, a mentally unstable 22-year-old, ran into a police station and assaulted two police officers with a knife. One of the two police officers shot and killed him in self-defence.[139] When the news of Bajaka's death came out, riots ensued. But even in this violent response to perceived heavy-handedness on the part of the police, nothing indicated support for jihadist creed or cells. Rather, it appeared that the

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[136] F. Demant and B. de Graaf, "How to Counter Radical Narratives: Dutch Deradicalization Policy in the Case of Moluccan and Islamic Radicals," *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 33, no. 5 (2010): 422.

[137] J. Groen and A. Kranenberg, "'Alles Klopte', Dus Werd Dreiging Reëel," *Volkskrant*, March 13, 2009, http://www.volkskrant.nl/vk/nl/2664/Nieuws/article/detail/320361/2009/03/13/lsquo-Alles-klopte-rsquo-dus-werd-dreiging-reeel.dhtml.

[138] Eijkman, Lettinga, and Verbossen, *Impact of Counterterrorism on Communities*, 29.

[139] E. Bakker and T. Veldhuis, *Muslims in the Netherlands: Tensions and Violent Conflict*, MICROCON Policy Working Paper (Brighton: MICROCON, 2009), 4.

vandalism was perpetrated by petty criminals who were known to the police.[140]

What these examples show, is that the cases in which the police failed to observe the counterterrorism principle of restraint in the use of force did not feed a radical narrative about a giant clash between the *ummah* and the unbelievers. Some in the Muslim communities in the Netherlands may have taken the false alarms as discriminatory, but that did not lead them to the conclusion that they should take up arms to overthrow the existing order and replace it with a caliphate governed exclusively according to rules laid down in the Quran. That police heavy-handedness did not lead to a strengthening of the jihadist support base, is also clear from the timing of the events. The misguided arrests and the false alarms coincided with a weakening of the jihadist movement, which makes clear that collateral damage in counterterrorism does not automatically lead to support for the foe that is being fought. The Dutch case can thus be taken as a refutation of the program theory regarding violations of the counterterrorism principle 'restraint in the use of force', although perhaps with the reservation that the cases in which excessive force were used, were relatively modest in comparison to, for example, the overreaction of the British army after it was first deployed in Northern Ireland to fight the Provisional IRA (see section 7.2.1). The counterterrorism literature is rife with claims that lacks of restraint in the use of force will increase the support for terrorist entities, but the Dutch fight against jihadist terrorism, in which some instances of unnecessary police force did occur, does not provide any evidence to this effect.

8.3.5 International cooperation

An active member of international organisations like the EU, the UN, NATO, the Financial Action Task Force (FATF) and the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), the Netherlands was

[140] M. Verburg, "Welten Attent Op Parijse Toestanden," *Algemeen Dagblad*, October 18, 2007, http://www.ad.nl/ad/nl/1012/Nederland/article/detail/2288722/2007/10/18/Welten-attent-op-Parijse-toestanden.dhtml.

involved in a host of international responses to the emergence of the terrorist threat after 9/11.

The most important forum for counterterrorism cooperation was the EU. After 9/11 the heads of government of the EU Member States agreed relatively quickly on a common definition of terrorism and drew up the EU Terror List, which obliged all Member States to impose sanctions on all people and organisations that were on it.[141] Also, as the transnational character of jihadist terrorism was widely recognised, the exchange of terrorism-related intelligence between the Member States was intensified. The Council of the European Union decided to found the Joint Situation Centre (SitCen), which was mandated to make European threat assessments, partially on the basis of information provided by the intelligence services of the Member States.[142] While technically not an EU-organ, Europol too, was given a considerably more important role in the exchange of terrorism-related information. Law enforcement agencies of the signatory states of the Europol Convention, which includes the Netherlands, have representatives at Europol to keep each other abreast of important incidents and developments.[143]

Much of the EU response to the Madrid bombings, however, concerned law enforcement in general rather than counterterrorism. Using the window of opportunity that was offered to them by the widespread fear of terrorist attacks, the heads of government of the Member States seized the opportunity to boost the European law enforcement cooperation they ad been trying to get off the ground for years. The flagship of these attempts was the European Arrest Warrant, which would allow police

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[141] Council of the European Union, "Council Common Position of 27 December 2001 on the Application of Specific Measures to Combat Terrorism," December 27, 2001, http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=OJ:L:2001:344:0093:0096:EN:PDF; Council of the European Union, "Council Framework Decision of 13 June 2002 on Combating Terrorism," June 13, 2002, http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32002F0475&from=EN.

[142] E.R. Hertzberger, *Counter-Terrorism Intelligence Cooperation in the European Union* (Turin: UNICRI, 2007), 66.

[143] Ibid., 74–75.

forces to arrest suspects who are wanted in other EU Member States. In a similar vein, this period also witnessed the introduction of the Joint Investigation Teams (JITs), in which police forces of different countries could investigate cross-borders crimes.

Another forum in which the Netherlands was involved in international counterterrorism cooperation was the UN. One of the UN's *pièces de resistance* in the fight against terrorism is Security Council Resolution 1373, adopted in September 2001. The resolution obliges the signatory states to freeze the financial assets of individuals involved in the preparation of terrorist attacks. Dutch Foreign Minister Ben Bot later appealed to this resolution to justify the freezing of the financial assets of several members of the Hofstad Group.[144] More specifically with regard to the financing of terrorism, the Netherlands adopted the so-called Fourty Recommendations and the Nine Special Recommendations as formulated by the Financial Action Task Force. These two sets of recommendations were partially drawn up to make it harder for terrorists to gather the financial resources needed to carry out their attacks.[145]

But farranging and consequential as these forms of international cooperation may have been, it is far from clear that they had much of a bearing on the jihadist movement in the Netherlands. First, the international cooperation described in the previous paragraph was aimed at the creation of a framework within which terrorism can adequately be countered. In other words, it concerned the creation rather than the application of counterterrorism instruments, and it is the latter kind of government action that is relevant for the current study.

Second, for those forms of international cooperation that did constitute an application of policy instruments, such as cross-border criminal

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[144] A. Olgun, "Hofstadgroep: 'Voor Deze Jongens Is Het Nu Echt Afgelopen,'" *NRC Handelsblad*, April 21, 2006, http://vorige.nrc.nl/dossiers/moslimterreur/article1675590.ece.

[145] Financial Action Task Force, "IX Special Recommendations," accessed April 30, 2014, http://www.fatf-gafi.org/topics/fatfrecommendations/documents/ixspecialrecommendations.html.

investigations or the exchange of intelligence, they did not affect the Hofstadgroup and the cell around Samir A. As has been mentioned in the introduction, the Dutch jihadist movement was only marginally plugged into the wider jihadist movement, and the AIVD gathered most of the intelligence on the Hofstad Group and the cell around Samir Azzouz by itself. It is, of course, not known to what extent they acted on information and intelligence from other European police agencies or intelligence services, but the information that is available does not suggest a deep involvement of police or intelligence agencies outside of the Netherlands. It is true that the Portuguese police tipped off the AIVD about an alleged plan to kill Manuel Barosso, but other than that, there is no reason to suppose that the fight against the Dutch jihadist movement was transnational teamwork.

Given the limited extent to which the Dutch jihadist movement was affected by international cooperation, there is no way to argue that it had the effect that was outlined in the programme theory for 'international cooperation'. As the preceding paragraphs have shown, international cooperation was certainly applied, as the Netherlands was – and is – part of a wide range of international organisations that contribute to the fight against terrorism. However, since the nature of the Dutch jihadist movement was such that none – or very few – of these efforts were in practice directed at them, we will consider this principle 'not applied' in this case.

8.4 Conclusion

As we have seen in the introduction to this chapter, the Dutch government prided itself on its 'broad approach', which took not only terrorism, but also radicalisation into account. The irony of the assessment about the effectiveness of the various counterterrorism principles (see figure 21 for an overview) is that the Dutch government has been much more successful in the traditional elements that are part of any counterterrorism policy, namely policing and intelligence. The AIVD knew a lot about the Hofstad Group and the cell around Samir Azzouz, by all appearances the most aggressive elements of the Dutch jihadist

movement. The intelligence about the activities of these individuals was helpful in thwarting the terrorist plots that Azzouz and the others in the Hofstad Group were working on. Also, the arrests of Azzouz, Walters, el-Fathni and Bouyeri, and the expulsion of 31 foreigners who played a role in the Dutch jihadist milieu were followed by a steep decline in jihadist activity. The movement essentially flatlined, and never came back. It is true that the jihadist cells whose members travelled to the Syrian civil war constituted a resurgence of jihadism in the Netherlands, but they should be considered a different movement. There was no personal overlap between the two generations, since some in the most recent wave were only ten years old at the time of the Van Gogh murder.

It was only after the Dutch jihadist movement was dismantled that the Action Plan Polarisation and Radicalisation was introduced. It is true that some counter radicalisation measures were in place before the Action Plan, as some municipalities in major cities had already carried out their own projects to dissuade people from adopting radical views. However, the Action Plan was the government's major effort, in financial resources and geographical scope as well as in the numbers of people that were exposed to the measures. By the time the projects of the Action Plan were carried out, the terrorist threat had already been reduced, so it is highly unlikely that the efforts to address the root causes of terrorism did much to undermine the threat emanating from the jihadist movement. It is possible that the projects under the Action Plan's aegis kept some at-risk youths from joining radical cells, but this is mere speculation. What we do know, is that there is no reason to assume that the Action Plan contributed to the decline of the jihadist movement in the Netherlands.

Furthermore, the swift collapse of the Dutch jihadist movement shows that the threat was perhaps not as severe as the Action Plan suggested. Terrorist organisations or movements with any degree of popular support can weather the removal of some of their members, but the jihadist scene in the Netherlands did not have this level of resilience. The fact that it fell apart after one series of arrests suggests that there were few sympathisers who were willing to take the place of the arrestees, and few authority

figures to steer the movement in the right direction. The lack of support is also clear from the response of Dutch Muslims to the arrests of innocent civilians and other incidents they could perceive as discriminatory, such as the release of *Fitna* and the shooting of Bilal Bajaka. The accepted reading in the counterterrorism literature is that overreliance on the use of force strengthens the support base of the terrorists. The Dutch jihadist movement, however, is an exception to this rule, as it did not draw any support from these incidents. There were, to be sure, protests, but neither Geert Wilders' movie nor the arrests of innocent Muslim civilians were seen as confirming a radical or jihadist reading of the world. Given this lack of popular support, it is not unfair to say that the Action Plan was based on a misreading of the potential of the jihadist movement. In most cases, government overreaction to a terrorist threat takes the form of excessive use of force. The Dutch government is an interesting deviation from this pattern, as it overreacted in the use of a 'soft' approach, which it deployed against a terrorist threat that had already been contained by repressive means.

	Outcome	Explanation
Jihadist movement in the Netherlands		
Restraint in the use of force	Violations not counterproductive	Lacks of restraint in the use of force in the fight against jihadist terrorism in the Netherlands did not lead to increases of support for the jihadist movement
Rule of law	Not applicable	
International cooperation	Not applicable	The Netherlands did engage in international cooperation, but these efforts were not clearly or explicitly targeted against the largely domestically oriented Dutch jihadist movement
Long-term commitment	Not applied	
Addressing root causes	Flawed implementation	The efforts to address the root causes of the Dutch jihadist threat were implemented only after the threat had been reduced by kinetic means and were based on an overestimation of the jihadists' potential support base
Law enforcement and direct action	Effective	The arrests of the most active jihadists and the expulsion out of the country of leading movement members contributed significantly to the "neutralisation" of the threat
Offering a counter narrative	Not applied	
Offering exits	Not applied	
Offering non-violent alternatives	Not applied	
Intelligence gathering	Effective	The Dutch secret services knew much about the attack plans of the most active jihadist cells in the Netherlands and were able to foil almost all these plans

Figure 21. Counterterrorism principles as applied against the Dutch jihadist movement